The Government is committed to preserving autonomy of our Resarch & Development activities in the nuclear field as well as integrity of our Three-Stage Nuclear Programme.

Indian and Pakistani Prisoners

1075. SHRI DARA SINGH: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Indian and Pakistani prisoners currently held captive in the jails of the respective countries, category-wise;

(b) the number of prisoners released by the two countries during the last two years, till date;

(c) the number of Indian fishermen held illegally in Pakistan;

(d) the steps taken by Government to release POWs/fishermen/military and civilians from Pakistani jails till date;

(e) whether Government have any proposal to cover Indian fishermen fishing in territorial waters under an insurance scheme; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) According to information available, 136 Indian civilian prisoners, 412 fishermen and 74 POWs are in Pakistani jails. However, Pakistan Government does not acknowledge presence of any Indian POWs in its jails. The information pertaining to the number of Pakistani civilian prisoners is being obtained from the authorities concerned. There are no Pakistani POWs in Indian jails.

(b) In 2005, Pakistan released 1171 Indian fishermen and 125 civilian prisoners. In 2006, 73 fishermen and 19 Indian prisoners have so far been released. In 2005, India released 222 Pakistani fishermen and 159 civilian prisoners. In 2006, India has released 60 Pakistani civilian prisoners and 59 fishermen so far.

(c) There are 412 Indian fishermen held in custody in Pakistan.

(d) Government has been consistently taking up the matter of release of Indian prisoners with Pakistan Government at various levels. The two countries reached an understanding at the Home Secretary level talks on May 30-31 2006 in Islamabad under which both sides agreed that fishermen and civilian prisoners, who have completed their prison sentences and

have been granted consular access and whose national status has been verified, would be released by 30 June 2006. in addition, they also agreed to exchange lists of civilian prisoners by 15 June 2006 to facilitate the consular access by 31 July 2006 and subsequent release. Following this understanding, consular access to 192 Indian fishermen and 48 civilian prisoners was given by Pakistan, while India provided consular access to 42 Pakistani civilian prisoners in July 2006.

(e) and (f) The centrally sponsored insurance scheme for fishermen is under the control of Ministry of Agriculture. According to this all fishermen in marine and inland sector are covered against death, permanent/partial disability suffered during fishing. The insurance policy in respect of the beneficiaries from coastal States are shared equally between Centre and States while in respect of UTs, the insurance policy is fully borne by the Centre. The National Federation of fishermen's Cooperatives Ltd. (Fishcopfed) is the implementing agency. Compensation for death/ permanent total disability is Rs. 50,000/- and the cover for partial/permanent disability is Rs. 25,000.

Shortage of staff in passport offices

1076. SHRI T.T.V. DHINAKARAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there is acute shortage of staff at various passport offices in this country including Trichy and Chennai;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) by when these vacancies are likely to be filled up; and

(d) whether Government open more Regional Passport Offices in Tamil Nadu?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. In view of the growing workload, all passport offices, including those at Trichy and Chennai are experiencing shortage of manpower.

(c) The Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) of the Ministry of Finance had carried out a detailed work study in Passport Offices in India. The SIU has recommended creation of 293 additional posts in various categories. The matter is under consideration in the Ministry of Finance.

(d) There is a demand for opening of new Passport Office at various places in Tamil Nadu. However, no decision has been taken so far.